



A Cure for Dreams

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Kaye Gibbons' third novel, like her first, the much-acclaimed ELLEN FOSTER, and her second, A VIRTUOUS WOMAN, explores women's experiences and perspectives. A CURE FOR DREAMS is narrated by Betty Davies Randolph, a woman who appreciates the strengths that lie in humor and common sense and who respects the need for human kinship. She tells the story of her mother, Lottie O'Cadhain Davies.

The novel is for the most part an account of Lottie's fierce refusal to let the harsh economics of the Depression, or a dead marriage, squash her delight in living. Having established herself as queen bee in their small rural community, Lottie orchestrates a weekly women's card game and stays busy solving other people's problems, with and without consent. Her daughter marks her mother's every move and learns her mother's secret ways for being "very wise with people." Lottie's resourcefulness is both awe-inspiring for Betty and, later, an impediment to her own emerging identity. In the last sections of the novel, Betty describes her own first attempts at independence, trying to get out from under Lottie's strong protective wing.

It is rare these days to read a novel in which the language itself—richly metaphorical, homely, genuinely beautiful—assumes the role of protagonist. Through Betty's voice, Gibbons paints a portrait of daily rural life filled with affection and respect for its hardships, joys, and idiosyncrasies. She also reveals surprises stored in the genuine dialogue of country people. We learn, for example, that a mother of seven who had first given birth at thirteen thus "understandably mourned sweets." Her no-account husband "took his foot in his hand and left." She, "with already enough kids to bait a trotline," is left not only stranded but also "fooled up with twins." Helping this poor and ill-mannered woman becomes one of Lottie's chief projects.

"Talking was my mother's life," says Marjorie Polly Randolph, daughter of the narrator, in a foreword to her mother's account. And one couldn't ask for a better conversationalist: Betty is master of her art. With love, restraint, and purpose, she weaves the story of her dauntless mother and examines the bonds of their relationship. In A CURE FOR DREAMS, Gibbons has created voices true to the locality and the era, rendered with such sensitivity and spirit that the reader must succumb to their insistence, their desire for life and friendship.

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